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The Organization of American States (OAS) in Rhetoric and Reality

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how well the countries in the Western Hemisphere translate Organization of American States' (OAS) resolutions into actual meaningful legislation, and how international discourse influences, or does not, domestic policy. This study will utilize the data program QDA Miner in order to better analyze texts of agreements and treaties put forth by the OAS, and to highlight the correlation between different types of rhetoric and meaningful member state action. Data will be gathered primarily from the OAS' own data bases and compiled into the QDA software for analysis. This analysis will allow the agreements to be divided into "rhetoric categories."

After the agreements are analyzed and divided up into their respective rhetoric categories, regression will be run using SPSS 19.1 IBM software. This software will allow for the interpretation of whether or not there is a correlation between competing types of international discourse and the domestic policies of member states.

Prior to this study, many different research studies have been carried out to examine what compels different countries act in accordance with International Organizations and what does not. Compliance with international declarations and agreements has long since been a question and focal point of study when analyzing international institutions and this study aims to understand what role, if any, language and rhetoric plays in the issue of compliance.

From Force to Forceful Language: A Review of the Literature

The question of compliance has long since been a puzzle for scholars of international relations and international organizations. International institutions are structures that aim to unify and organize a group, or groups of countries¹. These institutions are formed on a voluntary basis, and this is where the trouble the starts². If an institution is comprised of voluntary members, then how can a resolution-writing assembly, even a centralized one, get member nations to comply with declarations and agreements? There are two major competing theories that seek to explain compliance with international declarations and agreements: 1) the collective goods theory; and, 2) the fear of being the outsider theory. This portion of the study will aim to examine them and offer another possible explanatory theory, namely the rhetorical approach.

From a structural standpoint, money makes the institution. An institution can expect no action if it does not have a budget. If an institution is created on voluntary membership, then its budget, too, must be created on voluntary payments. While payments may be optional and non-desirable for member states, the reception of collective goods and benefits from the institution is desirable³.

¹ Bennett, p 34

² Bennett, p. 41. According to Bennett, the voluntary aspect of international organizations represents both a positive and a negative aspect. On the positive side, the voluntary nature of the international organizations allows member states to join freely and not feel as though they are giving up sovereignty to do so. On the negative side, since they are voluntary, action is sometimes limited and the organizations must be tread lightly when making decisions, as it could result in a loss of members.

³ Larsen-Freeman, p. 48. In a perfect scenario for any member country, payment would not be necessary. If a country chooses not to pay, however, the overall budget of the organization goes down – and the collective goods within the organization, too, plummet.

One of the most alluring features of any group, from the local, regional, national levels to the international levels, are the collective goods that the group can provide. One way that any institution seeks to attract membership is to show potential members that the overall good of the group would be greater, if each individual member provided to the group as a whole.⁴ Any member that joins the group, so long as they follow the rules of the group and participate in the group's affairs, can benefit from the group's collective goods⁵. In order to gain anything from a group, one must put in to the group – a simple give and take, but you cannot have one without the other.

This theory is relatively simple in its logic: if a country becomes a member of an institution and follows the bylaws of that institution, that country seeks to gain all the benefits that the institution has to offer⁶. This simple logic has been analyzed and used to explain member state's compliance with institutional declarations and agreements for decades. It relies on "rational behavior" and the idea of "collective conceptualization" from all member states.⁷ Member states, if they are rational actors, would join these institutions in order to receive countless benefits and collective goods ranging from but

⁴ Gowa, p.12. The collective goods of any organization naturally augment if more members that are willing to contribute join.

⁵ Gowa, p.13. This is an important point that ties back to Bennett's discussion of voluntary. As Bennett pointed out, membership (and all that comes along with membership, e.g. following the rules) is voluntary. Gowa points out, however, that the only way a member state will benefit from the collective good is if that member state abides by the rules of the organization. If a member state, for example, joined an organization, but did not contribute and did not ever follow the rules of that organization, that member state could not expect to benefit from the collective goods.

⁶ It must be noted that this logic is based off the assumption that other member states will also abide by the same set of rules, following the same logic.

⁷ Riggins, p.xxii

not limited to, “collective security, increased technological advancements & trade markets.”⁸

Based on this theory, there can be power in numbers. Assuming that participating member states actually aim to positively contribute to the group, then it is better to work in conjunction with other member states than to rely solely on the brainpower, manpower and economic power of your own member state. “Higher levels of performance” can only emerge from “cooperation and constant partnership” between member states⁹. For example, the United States, based on this theory, would be better off joining an institution that offered discounts on oil, since it does not have enough oil to sustain itself¹⁰. Many small and recently formed European states find themselves joining Western European alliance coalitions to “offset and reduce costs of telecommunications, a good which is needed but difficult for new nations to produce.”¹¹ And the same can be seen in Latin America, with many smaller nations joining the Organization of American States to

⁸ Weymann, chp. 6. Collective goods can be small or large, they can be simple or complicated; each collective good is unique. In order to get any of the collective goods, large or small, a member state must first act in accordance with the organization. To do so requires, as Weymann points out, rational action.

⁹ Lee, p.2. As member states begin to interact with each other, whether that be multi-laterally or bi-laterally, greater productivity can be the result. Cooperation is often a way to increase output.

¹⁰ Kapur, 1995. It makes sense logically for a country to go outside of its borders to get a good or service that it does not have on its own.

¹¹ Sandholtz, p.91. It can be seen from this example that some goods, while desirable, are difficult for small and developing nations to attain. In these cases, it is smartest for smaller countries to join international organizations and agreements to get the goods that they cannot get on their own.

partake in treaties and security alliances to protect themselves from the “threat of piracy and intervention.”¹²

All across the globe, collective goods serve to be a major reason why countries join institutions and organizations. But it is not enough to merely join the organization. In order to receive the benefits, a member country must follow the bylaws and declarations of the organization.

The collective goods and benefits theory casts a rationalist light on international politics and makes the assumption that all members are rational and self-serving. Based on this theory, it would be unlikely that a member country would follow a declaration or agreement without the promise of some collective good.

Another competing theory is centered on the “fear of being the outsider.”¹³ Rather than complying with agreements and declarations to receive collective goods, this school of thought suggests that member countries comply with agreements and declarations to avoid being perceived as the outsider or rebel within an organization.¹⁴ In other words, member states comply to uphold the organizational norms.

International institutions have an “innate and general propensity” for states “to comply with international treaties, declarations and agreements.”¹⁵ The analogy is like a

¹² Foran, p.147. Foran suggests that smaller and lesser developed countries often coalesce because the power that they can amass in a group is much greater than the power they could produce unilaterally.

¹³ Haas, 1997

¹⁴ Haas, 1997. Transparency is a major tool that international organizations use to get countries to comply with treaties and agreements. Within the structures of many international organizations, the actions of all member states are visible. If, for example, one member country is blatantly ignoring a declaration, all member countries have easy access to this information. If a country is constantly seen as disregarding agreements and declarations, this country becomes vulnerable within the group.

¹⁵ Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, p.84

game with a set of players. Each player must follow the rules, and negligence is transparent. For this reason, if a member country (or player) does not follow a declaration or agreement (or breaks the rules), all other member countries will see and therefore judge the delinquent member country,¹⁶ or worse, impose isolation or excess trade costs on the delinquent member country.

Member countries feel a pressure to conform and comply with international institution's agreements and declarations simply to avoid the chastisement of other member states. J Harrop, author of *Norms and Nannies: The Impact of International Organizations*, compares the situation to being bullied in the schoolyard. The international institution is the bully, so to speak, and the member countries are fellow classmates who comply to avoid the wrath of the older bully. And true to the playground analogy, other member countries (or classmates), often team up with the bully, even if they do not really believe in what the bully is doing or saying, leaving those who openly go against the grain susceptible to being socially ostracized from the group.¹⁷

Both schools of thought are logically sound and straightforward. Both offer insight into the pivotal question of why states act in accordance with an international institution's declarations and agreements, yet neither can fully explain the phenomena. A third school of thought, which has yet to be fully assessed, is the rhetorical approach and the power of language. Language is defined as any means of communication, verbal or written, that allows two or more people or groups of people to interact with one and

¹⁶ Fang, p.13. This compliments Haas' theory of transparency and the fear of being the outsider.

¹⁷ Harrop, pp.152-159.

other¹⁸. Language is what allows the declarations and agreements to be communicated, and without language these documents would not be created. Even with this knowledge, however, many are quick to overlook the careful language that is put into each agreement and declaration.

It is no mistake that diplomats and legislative bodies spend countless hours and efforts to choose each word in every agreement and declaration put forth. The reason for this is as clear as the logic in the aforementioned schools of thought. Language has power and influence to frame issues and debates, to shift the nuanced connotations of words, and to reflect the strength of societal and regional norms. If something is worded to strongly, it could be mistaken as offensive¹⁹. Conversely, if something is worded to ambiguously or weakly, it could be ignored and not taken seriously²⁰. There is a fine line between aggressive and passive language, and when it comes to compliance, the line must be respected.

The psychological power of language can be just as important as the political environment of any given institution²¹. The two most important facets of good diplomatic language that will produce compliance are clarity and tone.

Any document, which seeks to gain compliance, must obviously be clear. If a piece is not clear, and member states do not understand what is being asked of them, the

¹⁸ Conley, p.17

¹⁹ Thornborrow, p. 32

²⁰ Thornborrow, p.34

²¹ Kitzinger, p. 38. Kitzinger argues that language has a truly dynamic power. It has the power to shift and mold beliefs. Language can both inspire people and turn people away from any particular cause. A positive outcome could seem negative with the proper wording, and the converse can also be true. Language really does have the power to call for action.

hope that they will comply is zero. It can be assumed, for the purpose of this paper, that any document that has become an official declaration or agreement is clear.

Tone is perhaps the most important part of any written or verbal declaration. Aggressive language that is too harsh will immediately produce feelings of hostility²². Aggressive language can be defined as language with but not limited to “profanity, direct threats, excessive mandates, condescending wording, excessive informal pronoun usage, and extremely rigid and unattainable time frames.”²³ Aggressive language, though unhelpful when it comes to international diplomacy, is often used by authority figures that feel strongly about accomplishing a certain goal, or feel strongly that one member needs to somehow be reprimanded.²⁴ The thought behind this tactic is logical – an angry tone will send a serious and powerful message. Powerful language asserts power, right?

In the case of international institutions and achieving solidarity and collective action amongst member states, there is a “certain paradox” that collective action “poses for individual member states and central bodies of power.”²⁵ In many cases, an authority figure is advised to use aggressive language. Think for example, to the captain of a sports team. When his or her team is playing poorly, or he needs to rally them up for a big game, aggressive language is most always used. It has a way of inciting players to act.

²² Kitzinger, p. 51. This is true across all levels of the spectrum from personal interaction to international level interaction. A message that is worded aggressively has an innate ability to deter the listener (whether that be a person, or a country).

²³ Giles, 1987

²⁴ Giles, 1987. This can be analogous to a parent and a child. Often times when a child misbehaves a parent feels it necessary to scold the child. Although this can sometimes have the reverse effect, the parent often believes that scolding the child will mold that child into behaving a certain way.

²⁵ Donnellon, p. 19

The dynamic in an international institution, however, is vastly different.²⁶ There is, as Donnellon suggests, less of a need to be incited (or fired up so to speak), and more of a need to be coaxed into acting.²⁷

Persuasive language, therefore, is the best way to get member states to act in accordance with agreements and declarations. Persuasive language is language that “poses a solution rather than just focusing on a problem” and “asserts that this solution is the best solution.”²⁸ Persuasive language by no means poses a threat to any member state, but rather highlights the importance of action²⁹. Persuasive language sets out to create a “collective and solidified identity” amongst member states and subtly puts pressure on each member state to act - without each member state’s cooperation, the goal has no way of being accomplished.

As opposed to aggressive language, persuasive language often carries more of an encouraging connotation. It aims to encourage member states to act, rather than forcing them to do so. A gentle prod, rather than a forceful shove.

Although none would deny the importance of language in the creation of agreements and declarations, detailed research into the effects of language on compliance

²⁶ Because it is cooperative collective action where the benefit is derived through cooperating with other sides, whereas the sports team derives benefits through collective action to defeat the other team. In other words, there is an in group and out group that requires them to cooperate with each other in order to compete with/ destroy the other group (similar to a military organization, but different from an institution where there is no other to destroy (or doing so would actually deprive them of the benefits of the organization).

²⁷ Donnellon, p.25. International organizations and member states are different from sports teams and players because of diplomacy. Sports teams are very aggressive and competitive, and while international organizations and member states can also have those qualities, the latter is done so in a politically correct and proper arena.

²⁸ Kitzinger, p.71

²⁹ Kitzinger, p. 73. This type of language offers incentives and emphasizes the positive results of acting, rather than threatening the negative results of disobeying.

and cooperation has yet to be carried out in full. This study aims to examine whether or not language plays a role in getting member states to act on the agreements and declarations that they have signed on to within international institutions that they have joined – specifically the Organization of American States (OAS).

Contributions of This Research

This research seeks to understand the relationship, if any, between the careful use of language within treaties and agreements put forth by international organizations, and the impact that it has on domestic policy making by member states to implement these agreements. For many years research has been carried out to show the effects of collective goods and a desire to obtain a group mentality. Previous research has shown that these theories do have an effect on a member state's policy-making choices. Research on language and the power of linguistic choices, however, has not yet been carried out.

For this reason, this paper will offer an alternative approach: the power of language.

Hypothesis

H1: The more aggressive the language is in an OAS declaration or agreement; the less likely countries will be to act in accordance with the declaration or agreement.

***The converse of this hypothesis would state: The more persuasive the language is in an OAS declaration or agreement; the more likely countries will be to act in accordance with the declaration or agreement.**

The central hypothesis aims to examine the effect that different types of rhetoric have on member state action within the context of the Organization of American States. A criticism of many international organizations is that agreements and declarations offered by the organizations are seldom put into practice³⁰.

Within the Organization of American States consensus is required for resolutions to be passed and put into effect. Declarations and agreements within the Organization of American States, however, are unique in that they do not require consensus. For this reason, declarations and agreements were selected as a helpful unit of analysis, since they offer the most variance in terms of signatories and member-state action.

The effects of language have been studied for quite some time, yet quantitative analysis on the effects of language on decision and policy making is marginal. For this reason the hypothesis was selected to serve as a means of studying the effects that the language within declarations and agreements, has on producing meaningful member-state action.

Methodology

³⁰ Coicaud, Jean- Marc, p. 2. Discusses the “legitimacy deficit” and explains the major challenge with International Organizations, since their foundations (the majority of which were founded 50 years ago), to be getting state governments to act in accordance with the wishes of the people and the international organizations. In other words, according with Coicaud, the major challenge is getting states *not* to act autonomously.

This paper will utilize QDA Miner 19.1, word-analyzing software. The software has the capability of analyzing the impact of certain words and/or phrase throughout a database of speeches, pieces of legislation, or any word-document. For this reason, all of the documents uploaded into the software had to be compiled manually – leaving some room for subjectivity.

This study will use declarations and agreements put forth by the OAS over three decades. Each declaration and agreement once uploaded into the QDA Miner 19.1 software will then be analyzed to examine how “aggressive” the text is. Aggressiveness of a text will be determined by assessing the number of aggressive words that exist within the declaration or agreement (this assessment will be traced using the QDA Miner 19.1 Software). Target words of aggression, which were selected based on Chapter 16, entitled “Signaling and Perception,” written by Richard Jervis (Columbia University), within the book *Political Psychology*, by Kristen R. Monroe. The following words were targeted within the QDA Miner 19.1 Software and traced throughout the declarations and agreements being analyzed: ‘mandates,’ ‘requires,’ ‘condemns,’ ‘detests,’ ‘dictates,’ ‘orders,’ and ‘censures.’ The number of times these target words appear within each declaration or agreement will be recorded and put into an SPSS database. This information will serve as the independent variable for this study.

Once compiled, the results of each declaration or agreement will be analyzed for each member country. Two factors for analysis will be used, utilizing SPSS software: 1) what percent of member countries signed onto the agreement or declaration? A percentage was required to ensure that the analysis was at the interval/ratio level of

analysis, which is necessary in order to run regression analysis and to obtain the Pearson R Correlation value. A percentage was obtained by manually dividing the number of cosignatories by the total number of member states (35) within the Organization of American States. The information available for this variable was obtained from the OAS Archives on agreements and declarations. 2) What was the total number of specific legislative or policy-related action carried out with the purpose of supporting the declaration or agreement? This data was obtained from within the OAS website, as well as the government websites of various member countries. The data compiled for these two variables were then entered into the same SPSS database as the “target words” data. The conjunction of these two factors will serve as the dependent variable for this study.

Two factors will be used because merely signing on to an agreement or declaration is not enough and does not ensure that a country actually intends to follow through with what it has signed on to. Historically, it is not uncommon for a country to sign on to a declaration and then do nothing more. It is necessary, but not sufficient to prove that a member country is acting in accordance with the declaration or agreement.

All data for this study was collected manually and the references for the data portion of this study are highlighted in bold face font in the references section.

Data and Findings:

Since all three variables were obtained at the interval/ratio level of analysis, regression analysis could be run on the dataset. The data set is comprised of twenty different agreements and declarations from over forty years. The actions of all thirty-five

member-countries were included for each of the twenty agreements and declarations. The following data was produced when regression analysis was run:

Dependent Variable 1: Percent of Signatories:

Correlations			
		@_of_CoSignat ories	Type_of_Langu age
Pearson Correlation	@_of_CoSignatories	1.000	.785
	Type_of_Language	.785	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	@_of_CoSignatories	.	.000
	Type_of_Language	.000	.
N	@_of_CoSignatories	20	20
	Type_of_Language	20	20

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.785 ^a	.616	.594	22.06340	.616	28.815	1	18	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Type_of_Language

The above graphics provide the data that was gathered from the regression analysis. The analysis shows a positive correlation at the 0.001 level of significance, meaning that there is a strong and highly significant relationship between the independent and dependent variable in question. It is also important to note that the dataset is complete and there are no missing pieces of data, as shown by the “Correlation Graphic,” under the N section which shows “20” for all cells.

From the correlation analysis it is clear that there is a strong, positive relationship between the type of language used and the percentage of signatories for each declaration and agreement being analyzed.

The model summary, however, shows the most significant findings. The Adjusted R Square produced a value of 0.594, meaning that 59.4% of the variance of why member states sign onto agreements or declarations can be explained based on the type of language.

Although this does not explain 100% of the variance, 59.4% is a rather-large portion, meaning that the empirical data strongly supports the hypothesized relationship.

Dependent Variable 2: Number of Member State Actions:

Correlations

		@#_of_Member_Actions	Type_of_Language
Pearson Correlation	@#_of_Member_Actions	1.000	.526
	Type_of_Language	.526	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	@#_of_Member_Actions	.	.009
	Type_of_Language	.009	.
N	@#_of_Member_Actions	20	20
	Type_of_Language	20	20

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.526 ^a	.276	.236	8.49493	.276	6.873	1	18	.017

a. Predictors: (Constant), Type_of_Language

The above graphics provide the data that was gathered from the regression analysis. The analysis shows a positive correlation at the 0.05 level of significance, meaning that there is a significant relationship between the independent and dependent variable in question. It is also important to note that the dataset is complete and there are no missing pieces of data, as shown by the “Correlation Graphic,” under the N section which shows “20” for all cells.

From the correlation analysis it is clear that there is a positive relationship between the type of language used in the declarations being analyzed and the number of concrete actions taken by member states to implement the declarations. Although the correlation is not as strong as the correlation between the type of language and the percent of signatories, there is still a significant and positive correlation nonetheless.

The model summary, however, shows the most significant findings. The Adjusted R Square produced a value of 0.236, meaning that 23.6% of the variance of why member states sign onto agreements or declarations can be explained based on the type of language.

Although this does not explain 100% of the variance, 23.6% is a substantial portion, meaning that the hypothesized relationship is again supported.

Discussion and Conclusions:

Both of the relationships analyzed produced significant results in terms of explaining why member states sign and act to implement agreements and declarations put forth by the Organization of American States.

The research shows that one reason why member states sign onto agreements or the type of language could explain declarations that an agreement or declaration contains. Other factors, such as voting blocs, regional alliances, or domestic policies also play a factor, but this study has provided information and data showing that language and rhetoric also plays a sizeable role in getting member states to sign onto agreements and declarations at the very least.

For this reason alone this research is invaluable. Member states and international organization agreement-writing personnel should carefully consider the findings of this research. It is evident, based on this research that rhetoric certainly has an effect on member countries signing onto agreements and declarations, and therefore should be considered carefully. Literature suggests that aggressive language is often sought out in order to bring precedence to certain issues and to highlight importance. This research, however, should serve as a precautionary tool for any member state or organization wishing to pursue this avenue in hopes of getting member-state concordance.

It must be noted, however, that the type of language explained the percentage of signatories dependent variable more than it explained the concrete actions taken variable. There are two possible explanations for this finding. First, that member states rarely carry out domestic policies pertaining to agreements and declarations, leaving little room for language to play an important factor in determining when to act and when not to act. Second, that there are external factors compelling member states to act.

The latter explanation leaves room for further research and examination. There are several factors identified in the literature review carried out for this study that could be further analyzed, but were not in this particular paper given the fact that they were out of the scope of this research.

The first could be political alliances. Political alliances are present within every organization from the local, to state, to national, to international level. Alliances are part of politics as coalitions and groups always form. For this reason, research would suggest that analyzing the effects of political alliances on getting member states to act would be beneficial, and could perhaps produce more significant results.

The second could be the political atmosphere. Time was accounted into this study in terms of elapsed time; it was not, however, analyzed contextually. In other words, different time periods produce different political environments. Perhaps a certain decade gave way to increased legislative action within the region. On the other hand, a different decade could have been more cautionary and/or lethargic in terms of domestic policies. For this reason, contextualizing time and adding it into the study could be of critical importance for further research.

The third and final alternative avenue of research could be the economic and budgetary environment. This research highlighted the power of the purse as a means of solidifying collective goods, but it did not examine the power of the purse as a restrictive or permissive factor in domestic politics. Recession, and its counterpart, growth, has enormously different effects on domestic policies and government programs. For this reason, if each member countries budget and economic standing could be operationalized and then assessed, it too could serve as a crucial variable for the research.

Even without analyzing these three, or additional, variables, the current paper has lent significant empirical support to the argument that rhetoric matters in international organizations, and in the impact of international agreements on domestic politics. Words that are written down, though they can be altered, frame arguments and have lasting effects on the policies that are created and the agreements and declarations that are supported. Though word choice and rhetorical strength are not exclusively used as deciding factors, none can deny the significance of language.

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